

I am proud to have worked with my colleague, Senator JEFF BINGAMAN, and others on a companion bill in the Senate.

I know after talking with service men and women from Arkansas that this is an important effort which will allow us to properly honor and recognize the individual sacrifice of those who put their lives on the line so far away from home to defend the freedom we cherish as Americans.

In an effort to demonstrate support for our men and women in the military, I am circulating a Soldiers Bill of Rights petition in Arkansas to demonstrate to my colleagues in Washington how important it is to honor the sacrifice of our veterans and their families. This legislation is one of ten priorities I have included in my Soldiers Bill of Rights and I hope we can pass this bill in the immediate future.

I close my remarks by commending my colleague, Congressman VIC SNYDER, who led this effort in the House. VIC is a good friend and a Vietnam Veteran, and I am very proud of his leadership on this issue on behalf of the constituents we represent in Arkansas.

#### GASOLINE FREE MARKET COMPETITION ACT

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I would like to express my support as a cosponsor for S. 1737, the Gasoline Free Market Competition Act. Over the past few months, oil prices have skyrocketed \$40 per barrel, the highest price since 1990. High gasoline prices are inextricably linked to high crude oil prices. And these high oil and gas prices hurt Americans across the Nation and from all walks of life. Farmers, teachers, and small business owners across the country and in Wisconsin in particular are getting hit hard by these outrageous costs.

The statistics are staggering. For gasoline, the increases in crude oil prices have resulted in an average national price of \$1.96 per gallon. In Wisconsin, the current average price for a gallon of self-service regular unleaded gasoline in Wisconsin is \$1.821, according to AAA's Fuel Gauge Report. The current average is 7.1 cents higher than a month ago at this time and 23.6 cents higher than a year ago at this time. These are the highest gas prices we have seen in 13 years.

Unfortunately, under current law, the Department of Energy can conduct investigations into gasoline prices, but it does have the power to enforce the law or sanction companies for price manipulation. On the other hand, the Federal Trade Commission, FTC, does have the power to protect consumers from gas price manipulation. The FTC is supposed to promote competition and free markets, but all too often, the FTC has not actively overseen energy markets to prevent price fixing and market manipulation.

Congress needs to direct the FTC to eliminate anticompetitive practices

that currently cause a chokehold on the competitiveness of independent gas distributors and gas station owners. That is why I am supporting the Gasoline Free Market Competition Act, S. 1737. This legislation would modernize antitrust law to prohibit anticompetitive practices by single companies in the concentrated gasoline markets. The gasoline market in Wisconsin and at least 27 other States are now considered to be "tight oligopolies" with four companies controlling more than 60 percent of the gasoline supplies. We need to ensure that these concentrated markets are not subject to manipulation.

S. 1737 would address two major problems tied to gasoline price-fixing called "redlining" and "zone pricing." In tightly concentrated markets, numerous studies have found oil company practices are driving independent wholesalers and dealers out of the market. One anticompetitive practice is called "redlining," which limits where independent distributors can sell their gasoline. As a result, independent stations must buy their gasoline directly from the oil company, usually at a higher price than the company's own brand-name stations pay. With these higher costs, the independent station cannot compete. Investigations have also found large consolidated oil companies control not just the buying choices of local gas stations, but also the selling prices of gasoline distributors. This anti-competitive practice is called zone pricing. The company bases prices not on the cost of producing gasoline, but on the maximum a neighborhood will pay.

The Gasoline Free Market Competition Act, S. 1737, will do three things to address this problem. First, the bill would establish "consumer watch zones" for concentrated gasoline markets like Wisconsin. Where a few companies control a large part of the market, they can manipulate supplies and restrict competition with ease. Therefore, the FTC should watch consolidated markets more carefully.

The Gasoline Free Market Competition Act also shifts the burden of proof for price-fixing. If the FTC finds that an oil company is employing anticompetitive practices in a consumer watch zone, the company should have to prove it is not hurting consumers. Redlining and zone pricing would be presumptively illegal. Oil companies that engage in anticompetitive practices that manipulate supply or limit competition would have to prove these practices do not hurt consumers.

Finally, the act gives the FTC clear "cease and desist" authority to stop price-fixing. In consumer watch zones, the FTC could issue "cease and desist" orders to companies participating in these anticompetitive practices, forcing them to stop gouging consumers. The Congress needs to act now to ensure that anticompetitive practices do not lead to further gas price increases, as many energy analysts are predicting.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO MATTHEW ROSS

• Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I rise to commend an outstanding young Floridian. Matthew Ross is an 11-year-old who has overcome tough circumstances and has succeeded. He recently won the prestigious national award, the Temple Grandin Award, for achievement in autism, became the first autistic child to serve as a page in the Florida House of Representatives and won the Special Olympics District Tournament Golfing Regionals in his area. What a year.

I had the privilege of meeting Matt recently. I was impressed by his polite demeanor and his interest in special education issues.

A little over a year ago, Matt was in special education classes because by his own words, he had "trouble with the way my brain processes information." He had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and, earlier, his mother had even considered placing him in a group home. But, now just some 12-13 months later he has blossomed. He is no longer in special education classes, and as I understand it has political aspirations. I give high praise to his mother, Susan Ross, who has steadfastly stood by Matt and made it possible for him to succeed.

I wish Matt all the luck and blessings in the world. Keep it up, Matt.●

##### RECOGNIZING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASIA FOUNDATION

• Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the Asia Foundation, a private, nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, CA, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2004.

The Asia Foundation is a national asset that has contributed in significant ways to the mutual interests of the people of Asia and the United States for a halfcentury.

Through its programs, the foundation has been instrumental at key moments in these five eventful decades. Early in its life, the foundation contributed to democracy, freedom, peace and constructive relations in post-World War II Asia. Since then, the foundation has invested in Asia's future leaders, built the capacity of democratic institutions, provided support to civil society groups, promoted the rights of women and created opportunities for economic growth and development.

Today, the foundation is contributing to new initiatives in the region, building new governance and opportunity in Afghanistan, for instance, through support to the Constitutional Loya Jirga, helping new democratic institutions in Indonesia and programs with moderate Muslim leaders, and continuing to support human rights and prospects for reform in Cambodia, Nepal, and throughout Asia.